

of Labor, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as many veterans organizations serving as advocates for veterans and their families across the country and servicemembers as they return.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER); the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), our full committee ranking member; and the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH), the Economic Opportunities Subcommittee ranking member, for their leadership and hard work on this bill. And, again, as was noted, I especially want to thank the staff.

Once again, this is a bipartisan bill, and I urge all Members to support the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005. This legislation offered by the Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee Mr. BUYER, would limit premium increases on health insurance for reservists who return to their civilian jobs after serving on active duty and ensure that reservists whose activation is cancelled before they report for duty can reinstate their health care coverage. It also would allow disabled service members to qualify for a housing grant provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs before being discharged from active duty. I support these provisions of the legislation because they protect the rights the men and women of our Armed Forces when they are on duty.

While I do support the provisions of this legislation, I do have concerns about the possible adverse impact on private insurance carriers. I strongly believe it is the responsibility of the Federal government to provide for the healthcare needs of our veterans. Private insurance should not carry the entire national burden of health care for military personnel. I hope that as the agenda of the Veterans Affairs Committee continues to unfold, further legislation will be introduced to provide healthcare for our veterans through the Federal government. We made a promise to our men and women in the Armed Forces that we would take care of them when they were no longer on active duty and we as a Government would be negligent if we did not keep our promise.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise today as a cosponsor and in support of H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005.

As our brave men and women continue to put their lives on the line for our Nation, we owe each of them the health care coverage they were promised and make it easier for their families to manage the transition to active duty and back to civilian life.

Reservists, who fulfill a critical mission in supplementing our fighting forces, should be treated equally and feel as safe as their active duty counterparts in that their employer provided insurance will still be available upon termination of federal benefits. But for too many reservists, this is not the case.

The Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act was passed, in part, to guarantee reinstatement of employer-provided health care following separation from active duty. However, an unintended consequence of that law allowed insurance companies to unfairly single out reservists by inflating their premiums once they returned to civilian life.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we are working to correct this problem by offering this bill as a remedy by protecting our brave reservists from inflated insurance premiums and giving them a helping hand as they return to civilian life.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2046, the Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection (SHIP) Act of 2005, and to voice my strong commitment and appreciation to our nation's servicemembers and veterans as we head into the Memorial Day weekend.

On May 11, 2005, my colleagues and I on the House Veterans Affairs Committee considered H.R. 2046. This important legislation would assist in providing a seamless transition for our Reservists and Guardsmen by curbing health insurance premium increases and preserving employer-sponsored health care coverage. I voted for this legislation because our servicemembers deserve better protections and improved quality of life.

I would also like to take this time to thank our past and current members of the U.S. Armed Forces for their selfless service to our country. We owe each of them a great deal of respect and appreciation, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. While many of us will be fortunate enough to be surrounded by loved ones this Memorial Day weekend, I encourage all Americans to take this special time to reflect on the sacrifice of those who died while serving their country and to pray for our troops currently in harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues in Congress to continue caring for our servicemembers by ensuring passage of H.R. 2046.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, as our soldiers face a time of war and strife across the globe, we must be mindful not only of the risks that they face in combat, but also the barriers that they face to planning a secure future here at home after the battle is done.

There are currently about 180,000 Americans serving in Iraq, and another 18,000 in and around Afghanistan. It is estimated that there are 1,652 Maryland national guard and reservists serving in combat today.

This bill is important, because it shows our commitment to the future of our troops, to the future of their families. Today soldiers do not pay taxes on their combat pay, as our way of saying that they are paying more than their fair share in the gift of service they bestow on their country. This is only right, and we owe our soldiers our gratitude. But we also owe them the gift of a future, and this bill allows soldiers to plan for that future even as they are protecting ours.

This bill gives soldiers the opportunity to save for their retirement by including combat zone pay as earned income in calculating the tax deduction for contributions to retirement savings plans.

I think we should go further. In my bill, the Pension Preservation and Savings Expansion Act, I included a provision that allows National

Guard members and military reservists called up on active duty to continue contributing to their workplace retirement plans where their employers pay them their salary differential during their active duty service. This important provision should also be brought to the floor for a vote.

We have an obligation to ensure that our soldiers have a secure present and a secure future, and this bill takes one important step in that direction. I urge a "yes" vote on the Heroes Earned Retirement Opportunities Act.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2046, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2046, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a), rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 32 minutes p.m.) the House stood in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m.

□ 1831

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN) at 6 o'clock and 31 minutes p.m.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2419, ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-94) on the resolution (H. Res. 291) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2419) making appropriations for energy and water development for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.